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PROPOSED MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1998-2001

Programme 23. Public information

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23.1 The overall objective of this programme is to promote, in cooperation with Governments of Member States, media organizations, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and the business community, public understanding of the objectives and the work of the Organization. To achieve this objective, the Department of Public Information will communicate the message of the United Nations more clearly and persuasively to targeted audiences, such as media practitioners, opinion leaders, members of non-governmental organizations, business organizations, students and teachers, and government officers at the local and national levels. The Department's public information programme of action aimed at reaching its targeted audiences will utilize various channels of modern communication such as the World Wide Web on the Internet, radio, television, photo and other electronic media, as well as public and liaison services. The premise for the programme is that only through public understanding of the United Nations can the Organization generate universal support for its mission to the peoples of the world.

23.2 Emphasis will be on developing information strategies, promotional activities and public services that will highlight the responsibilities and capabilities of the United Nations in carrying out its tasks in the fields of sustainable development, peace and security, democracy, human rights and humanitarian assistance, as mandated by the General Assembly and directed by the Secretary-General. To meet growing information needs in a changing political environment with limited resources, the implementation of the programme requires the closest cooperation with substantive departments, other offices of the Secretariat and the specialized agencies, programmes and funds of the United Nations system for the development of coordinated mechanisms to feed and link database and other records. The full implementation of the programme also requires the effective deployment of available staff resources and a focused approach to the dissemination of public information materials on the important issues affecting the lives of peoples of the world.

23.3 The Department of Public Information will be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The mandate for the programme is contained in General Assembly resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946, in which it is stated that public information activities should be undertaken to promote to the greatest possible extent an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations among the peoples of the world. This mandate has been further elaborated in subsequent resolutions of the Assembly on questions relating to information, the most recent of which are resolutions 50/31 A and B of 6 December 1995. In resolution 50/31 B, the Assembly reaffirmed that the activities of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, as the focal point of the public information tasks of the United Nations, should be strengthened and improved, keeping in view the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the priority areas defined by the Assembly and the recommendations of the Committee on Information.

23.4 The activities under this programme include:

(a) Planning and implementation of communications strategies for political, development, human rights and humanitarian issues of priority to the United Nations;

(b) Enhancement of close coordination within the Secretariat and throughout the United Nations system in the implementation of public information activities through a common approach;

(c) Development and production of information materials on the work and achievements of the Organization and their timely distribution in standards, formats, languages and other modes of transmission that maximize their use by the targeted audiences of the United Nations;

(d) Implementation of public information activities in the field through the network of United Nations information centres and services, as well as United Nations associations and other non-governmental organizations, national and international media, educational institutions and the business community;

(e) Provision of public information services to target audiences such as opinion-shapers and policy makers, publishers, media representatives and others involved in disseminating information materials;

(f) Making information on international situations and broad trends, as well as overall media coverage of the United Nations, available in a comprehensive and timely manner to the Secretary-General and senior officials of the Organization;

(g) Development and utilization of a global communications capability directly accessible by United Nations audiences;

(h) Production, promotion and sale of recurrent and other institutional publications, including bibliographic information in print and electronic formats;

(i) Providing delegations, Secretariat units and other official groups with the library materials and information required for their work with the greatest possible speed, convenience and economy;

(j) Coordination of publications policies and the management of the publications programme of the United Nations through the Publications Board.

23.5 It is anticipated that the implementation of this programme will lead to a greater understanding of the principles and objectives of the United Nations, as well as to the enhancement of its image as an effective Organization capable of carrying out the tasks mandated by the General Assembly and directed by the Secretary-General, and, above all, as an Organization capable of making substantive contributions to meet the needs of the peoples of the world and challenges posed by a rapidly changing international environment.

Subprogramme 23.1 Promotional services

23.6 The Department has sharpened its focus, highlighting issues of major concern to the international community in order to promote a positive understanding of the United Nations and its work and strengthened public support for its goals. The subprogramme will be carried out by the Promotion and Public

Services, the Library and Publications, and the Media Divisions in relation to their programmes of work.

23.7 The major objective of the subprogramme is to ensure that the United Nations speaks with one voice about the common goals of the Organization. This requires the Department to continue to serve as the focal point for all information activities within the Secretariat and to cooperate closely with the members of the United Nations system.

23.8 With the increased role of the United Nations in shaping a consensus around the issues of concern to the world community, the Department will accentuate elements of the work of the United Nations in order further to increase public interest in the Organization. A second objective of the subprogramme will be to increase the development of thematically integrated information strategies and activities targeted to specific key audiences around the world, including outreach programme activities for young people.

23.9 In the light of the evolving role of the United Nations in the fields of peacemaking, peace-building, human rights and democracy, a third objective of the subprogramme will be to establish a programme of action that would counter any misconceptions of the Organization's work by projecting the United Nations as an international forum for debating world issues, including highlighting its central role in world affairs. To that end, the Department, in close cooperation and coordination with other offices and substantive departments in the Secretariat, will further strengthen its information outreach activities in all areas - audiovisual and electronic format materials, recurrent and non-recurrent publications, as well as targeted liaison and public services - both at Headquarters and in the field through the network of United Nations information centres, services and offices. Public interest in the work and activities of the Organization will be further enhanced through the promotion of educational programmes about the United Nations, guided tours of the Headquarters building and the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna, as well as through increased availability of information about the United Nations via the electronic media.

23.10 The fourth objective of the subprogramme will be to implement measures aimed at ensuring the timely production of information materials and activities as well as their delivery to clearly defined audiences. Furthermore, the Department will ensure the appropriate use of information materials and continuous refinement of the activities aimed at promoting the work of the Organization. To accomplish this, there will be regular, systematic evaluation and review of information materials and activities in view of the specific objectives for which they were designed.

Subprogramme 23.2 Information services

23.11 The Department has continued to serve as the vital link between the United Nations and the news media, as well as with other redisseminators at Headquarters and in the field, by providing timely, comprehensive, balanced and reliable information on the proceedings of United Nations organs, important United Nations meetings and conferences, as well as on the activities of the Secretary-General. The subprogramme will be carried out by the Media Division,

the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General and the network of United Nations information centres, services and offices.

23.12 A major objective of this subprogramme will be to meet the increasing needs for information on the activities of the Organization, including those undertaken by the Secretary-General and senior officials. This will entail preparing press releases and news summaries - in English and French - for use by the press, delegations and the Secretariat, and providing radio and television coverage of United Nations events at Headquarters and in the field, producing radio and television news magazines for distribution to broadcasting organizations worldwide and providing photographs and photo features on the activities of the Organization. Furthermore, the United Nations World Wide Web home page will be continuously updated to ensure instant and easy access to United Nations information products.

23.13 The provision of authoritative and timely information by the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General to media representatives at Headquarters is an equally important objective of the subprogramme. Daily information on the activities of the Secretary-General and the work of the Organization relating to peace-keeping and peacemaking, humanitarian assistance and a wide range of economic and social issues is essential if the media is to reflect comprehensively and accurately the role of the Organization in all areas of its mandates and responsibilities.

23.14 A third objective of the subprogramme will be to meet regional and local needs by providing timely and adaptable information materials through the United Nations information centres and services to ensure access to information about the Organization by local audiences and to facilitate proactive information activities by the network of centres and services, and other United Nations field offices.

23.15 A fourth objective of the subprogramme will be to establish an international broadcasting system capable of sending information about the United Nations directly to audiences around the world. By taking full advantage of the latest advances in radio broadcasting technology, such as broadcaster-to-satellite-to-receiver systems, this new broadcasting capacity will be used in support of peace-keeping operations and humanitarian missions, as well as for the general public information needs of the United Nations and its common system.

23.16 A fifth objective of the subprogramme will be to monitor international situations and trends as reflected in the media, as well as coverage of the work of the Organization by major media networks, to ensure that the Secretary-General and senior officials of the Organization are kept informed of developments on the international scene in a comprehensive and timely manner.

Subprogramme 23.3 Library services

23.17 The purpose of the subprogramme is to provide reference, information and research services to delegates, missions of Member States, staff members and researchers, and to ensure the continuous maintenance of an archival system of United Nations documents and publications. This entails continued modernization of the services of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library through available technology and

upgrading on a continuous basis, including the implementation of an integrated library management system for all United Nations libraries. The subprogramme is carried out by the Library and Publications Division and the network of United Nations information centres and services.

23.18 The major objective of the subprogramme is to facilitate access to and use of library services. This will be achieved by supplying bibliographic and factual information about the Organization and its work and by introducing innovative and user-oriented reference technologies and research services, including training programmes for missions of Member States, United Nations reference assistants and librarians, and information officers.

23.19 A second objective of the subprogramme will be to increase the capacity of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to provide user-friendly services throughout the library system. This includes strengthening of the system of depository libraries in all regions and creating linkages among them for wider dissemination of United Nations information materials.

23.20 A third objective will be to establish better standards of bibliographic control so as to improve in-house production and processing of data for use by delegates, missions of Member States, staff members and academic institutions, as well as researchers on specific United Nations topics. This will entail issuing reference tools in print and non-print formats, maximizing the use of electronic services to facilitate access to databases in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and coordinating interdepartmental electronic services and databases with Secretariat-wide access. It will also entail standardizing bibliographic control over United Nations documents and publications, and the introduction of an Integrated Library Management System, which takes full advantage of the Secretariat's local area network infrastructure and client/server technology.

23.21 In conjunction with the implementation of the three subprogrammes, electronic dissemination of information is of increasingly crucial importance for the work of the Department. Major increases in outreach are made through established databases on the Internet, as more hypertext links are established around the world through high-quality broadcast telephone lines as well as via satellite. This development is enabling the Department to deliver high-quality information products while keeping abreast of advancing industry standards. The new World Wide Web home page on the Internet and the World Wide Web phone will continue to deliver regularly updated news and information products of high quality. The knowledge base of the home page will be augmented. The effort to expand and enhance electronic distribution will continue with the possible inclusion of audio and video clips of the Secretary-General and breaking news items on the home page.

Subprogramme 23.4 Publication services

23.22 The Library and Publications Division is responsible for implementing this subprogramme. Its major objective will be to increase the production of authoritative, fact-based, high-quality publications that showcase the vitality of the Organization's involvement in the major challenges of our time. Despite the proliferation of other powerful media, there continues to be a need for such publications because of their broad, long-term impact on opinion and policy.

Designed to promote the United Nations, both as an invaluable source of information on all the important areas of international concern and as a central actor in promoting peace and development, the publications will be addressed primarily to disseminators of information. The Department's continuing role as chair of the Publications Board will further enhance the overall effort to prioritize publications, as well as sharpen their focus, and to avoid duplication. High quality, cost-effectiveness and speed of production will be significantly enhanced by the use of desk-top publishing technology, universally deployed throughout the Department, and by greater reliance on internal reproduction facilities. A related objective, given developments in the field of communications technology and the increase in publications of an academic nature, is for the publications programme to establish closer links with the Dag Hammarskjöld Library.

23.23 The third objective of the subprogramme will be to establish important channels of dissemination of information about the work and the role of the Organization through promotion and sales of United Nations publications. This will be done through United Nations bookstores and other contracted vendors worldwide. A related objective is to increase revenue, so as to recover costs, through a dissemination policy that balances sales and free distribution. An additional approach to promote understanding of the Organization's purposes and work, while recovering full costs, will be achieved through guided tours. These are a useful information tool, offering the public first-hand information about the Organization and allowing for active question-and-answer sessions. The activities that will be undertaken aim at promoting an integrated and unified approach to dealing with public services at Headquarters, as well as at the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna, ensuring maximum public awareness and understanding of the work and the objectives of the Organization among the public, while increasing revenues.

23.24 Revenues accruing from the sale of United Nations publications by the Organization's bookstores in New York, Geneva and Vienna, will be enhanced through the pursuit of new markets and specific readerships, the introduction of a programme of book reviews, measures to improve accounting and billing systems, the application of appropriate pricing policies and enhanced coordination with both author departments and book agents. As part of its mandate, the Publications Board will continue to review and revise, as necessary, policies governing the preparation, production, distribution and sale of United Nations publications. Based on sales performance and feedback from readership, the sales services will advise author departments on improving the quality of their publications in order to reach as wide a readership as possible and generate maximum sale of successful titles. The upgrading and modernization of the bookstores, at Headquarters in the first instance, will aim at attracting more customers.